

“Clocking Field Time”: War-Making as Elevated Labor in the Whedonverse

Renee St. Louis and Miriam Riggs

The Whedonverse has been created largely during a period of war in the United States. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* explored the overlaps and distinctions between warriors and soldiers, operating under limited guidance on one hand and driven by institutional policy on the other. By 2004, its spin-off *Angel* ends with the words, “Let’s go to work,” emphasizing the necessary labor fighting forces perform, often behind the scenes or away from the everyday lives of civilians. The idea that soldiering is elevated and elevating labor—a calling for some, a job for others, but a contribution in any case—runs through the Whedonverse, encompassing major characters and plotlines on *Firefly*, *Dollhouse*, and *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, and extending into film and other ventures. In this paper, we examine the portrayals of soldiers, warriors, and war-making to develop a definition for the “soldier” in the Whedonverse, including duties, values, and attitudes. We map out the labors performed by soldiers, but perhaps most importantly, we assess the physical, mental, emotional, and moral costs of performing that labor. Who can be or become a “soldier” in the Whedonverse? What do they specifically contribute to society, and how does their work affect them as individuals and in their relationship to the surrounding community? What role does the likelihood of secrecy or isolation play in their work, in their responses to it, or to their relationship with the civilian population? To what degree is institutional authority useful and necessary in war, and in what ways is it problematic, unethical, or otherwise suspect? These are important questions to confront during a time of war-making that, despite media attention often occupies a limited, subordinate recollection in the daily lives of the majority of the U.S. population.